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Language Arts 2

Science 1

May 7, 2010

Lou Gehrig’s Disease

“Home run!” “Peanuts! Get your peanuts here!” These are usual sounds at a baseball game in the 1930’s. In the 1930’s, people went to see Lou Gehrig, a famous baseball player, play baseball in New York. But in 1938, things changed for Lou Gehrig. He was playing worse then he ever had before. He had no strength or energy to be able to play as well as he used to. On May 2nd 1939 Lou went to Yankee Stadium and the announcer spoke, “Ladies and gentlemen, Lou Gehrig's consecutive streak of 2,130 games played has ended.” ADD MWAA CITATION

Lou Gehrig was diagnosed with a rare disease, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis known as ALS. Over 5,000 people get ALS each year and over 300,000 Americans have it at any given time. ALS is also referred to as Lou Gehrig’s disease.

ALS causes muscles to stop working completely. The body consists of over one hundred billion motor neurons. Motor neurons, cells that run through the spinal cord, deliver messages to muscles. ALS kills motor neurons, which prevents messages from the brain getting to the muscles. With no messages from the brain, muscles will not operate. The muscles do not move without messages from the brain. ALS kills different neurons in each person so no two people will have the same issues.

ALS can strike anybody. It can be passed down in families or even haphazardly strike people. Most common in temperate climate areas, Lou Gehrig’s disease is more common to strike Caucasians. Most people affected are very active especially in sports like Lou Gehrig. A little over half of the people diagnosed with ALS are male. Most people are between the ages forty and seventy when they get ALS and are fifty-five years old when diagnosed.

Diagnosing ALS is difficult and diagnosed by using the process of elimination. There are no tests than can directly indicate if ALS is present. Two in one hundred thousand people will get ALS. To diagnose ALS, Doctors take statistics from tests and see if ALS could be present. Doctors have found that they can use Electromyography or EMG to detect the amount of electrical activity of muscles. Doctors can also use nerve conduction velocity or NCV testing. The tests may prove that the patient has a different disease then ALS. An additional test a doctor may request is magnetic resonance imaging or MRI to take pictures of the inside of the spinal cord and of the brain. Some simple tests doctors can do are check for tense muscles or overreaction of muscles. This can show the doctor if your muscles are getting messages from the brain. Finally, doctors check for clumsiness, twitching, cramps, or slurred speech. Diagnosing ALS is like putting together a puzzle.

Lou Gehrig’s Disease, a puzzle within itself, causes people to live two to five years after diagnosis. A little under half of ALS patients died after less than two years after diagnosis. About twenty percent live for two or three years, and about twenty five percent live three to five years. Yet, a little more than ten percent lived more than five years after diagnosis. Now ALS patients are living longer due to advances in medication and understanding of ALS. The most common cause of death, reparatory failure, occurs because the muscles controlling the lungs fail. The muscles that help the lungs stop working and cause suffocating. The heart, also a muscle affected by ALS, stops beating and put the patient in cardiac arrest. This hurts the family to know that their brother or sister could die at any moment.

Lou Gehrig’s Disease affects the family. The family of the patients needs to help and support them in every way they can. The patient looses their income and gets minimum social security benefits due to the economy. They have to purchase walkers, canes, wheelchairs, or scooters. They also have to renovate their house to make it wheelchair accessible. Eventually they need feeding tubes because they will not be able to eat. The drug costs are high for ALS patients. More and more research is being done to help this disease.

Research and clinical trials are some of the things people are doing to help find a cure for ALS. The US government is putting aside tens of billions of dollars to go to research of neurological disorders including ALS. Currently, mice are being bread with ALS to be tested on with different medications. If the tests results are positive, they hold clinical trials to test it on patients. There is one drug that can slow the effects of Lou Gehrig’s disease but since ALS is varied, does not help all patients. So far studies have shown that ALS is too unpredictable to find just one cure.

Lou Gehrig’s Disease is an unpredictable disease. It not only affects the patient but also affects the patient’s family and friends. It causes a long, slow death to its victim. It can strike anybody at anytime. Lou Gehrig had to give up baseball and eventually his life because of ALS.